

What God Wants to Give Me, Part 1 - Acts 17:16-17 – September 14th, 2008

- Paul is on his second missionary journey, and has been preaching the gospel and planting churches with new believers along the way.
- He had spent almost a month in Thessalonica, planting the church there that we know today, by the two epistles to the Thessalonians.
- We're sort of catching up with the Apostle Paul who had just fled from Berea during the night making his way to the city of Athens.

- Upon arriving in Athens, he will take a very different approach in his preaching of the gospel with the hopes of winning people to Christ.
- What's interesting about Luke's account of Paul in Athens is that we see him exhibit God given characteristics unique to his calling.
- These characteristics have to be God given, because they can't truly be manufactured. God gives Paul what he needs to reach Athens.

- This is part one of a study titled; "What God Wants to Give Me," because I believe what God gave Paul then, he wants to give us now.
- It is absolutely vital for us to understand that God wants to package His enabling and His empowering in with His calling on our lives.
- It can be said that; "the "how" of the Holy Spirit will enable us to do the "what" of God's Word so we can fulfill the "when" of God's call."

- There are dangers in both teaching and studying about Paul in Athens because we can get disconnected from its reality in our lives.
- This can happen when we look at what Paul did here and take away the notion that we need to do this or that or be more like Paul.
- Perhaps one of the most freeing truths in God's Word is that God intended our Christian experience to be a "get to," not a "got to."

1. A concern for the lost (Verse 16)

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, **he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.**

v16 While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens, he became greatly distressed because the city was full of idols.

- Not only does the Apostle Paul have a concern for the lost people in Athens, were told that he had become "greatly distressed."
- It's interesting to note how other translations render this verse in the way that they describe how Paul felt when he saw all the idolatry.

J.B. Phillips Modern English Translation: "Paul's soul was exasperated at the sight of a city so completely idolatrous"

Interlinear Greek New Testament: "Paul's spirit was painfully excited in him"

The Amplified Bible: "his spirit was grieved and roused to anger"

The Revised Standard Version: "his spirit was provoked with him"

- Question: Why would this provoke Paul this way? Was he expecting pagan's to act godly?
- I believe the answer is two-fold. First, the Jews were silent in the midst of the idolatry, and second, he had a concern for the lost.
- The Apostle Paul had this "God given" concern for them because of their numerous gods and rampant idolatry.
- It was said that there were so many Greek gods that it was easier to find a god than a man.

- You sort of get the impression that Paul was as passionate about their need for the Savior as he was compassionate for their condition.
- With this likely his first time in Athens you sort of wonder if he was as impressed with their culture as he was distressed by their idolatry.

"Although Athens had long since lost the political eminence which was hers in an earlier day, she continued to represent the highest level of culture attained in classical antiquity."

F.F. Bruce

- Athens, by all accounts, was a city of magnificent splendor in art, literature, oration and religion. It was the center of man's achievement.
- It was home to the likes of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus and Zeno, and was also famous for its mathematics and even astronomy.
- This Greek culture, in all of its grandeur, gave the world not only a love of knowledge and a love of beauty, but a love of freedom.

"But for all that, Greek civilization was spiritually bankrupt. They populated Mount Olympus with gods made in the image and likeness of men. ...The Greeks had no church, no creed, and no systematic theology. ...Greek philosophy found out many truths but never found the truth. ...All that came home to Paul as he wandered the streets of Athens, looking at the sights, inspecting the inscriptions on the countless idols, watching the ebb and flow of the human tides that thronged the thoroughfares of the market places, and the temples of this famous city. ...Paul looked out from the vantage point of Calvary and Athens taught him afresh and more vividly that man without Christ is lost."

John Phillips "Exploring Acts" v2 pp 344-345

2. An urgency for eternity (Verse 17a)

17a **So he reasoned in the synagogue** with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks,

v17a He decides to go into the synagogue, preach the gospel, and reason from the scriptures, with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks.

- You almost get the sense that had he not become greatly distressed for the lost, he would have waited for Timothy and Silas' arrival.
- Paul isn't wasting any time, as far as he's concerned, this is a life and death urgency for all eternity and won't allow for any delay.

Matthew 24:46-51 46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. 47 Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. 48 But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, **My lord delayeth his coming;** 49 And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; 50 The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, 51 And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. KJV

- If God had not given Paul this urgency for the business of eternity, Paul would have just visited the sites, and bought a few post cards.
- Perhaps Paul would have just dined out at some of Athens Greek restaurants made famous by their exquisite Mediterranean cuisine.